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A New View on Nuclear War

In 1976, a team of hard-liners rejected the Central Intelligence Agency's view of the Soviet nuclear buildup. Now, the views of 'Team B' dominate U.S. strategic policy. Second of two articles.

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Washington—From the very beginning the members of Team B had only one goal in mind: They were going to demonstrate that the Central Intelligence Agency was wrong in its most vital judgment, that the Soviet Union was not trying to achieve nuclear superiority.

For 10 years the CIA had concluded, in one form or another, that the Soviet Union accepted the idea that a nuclear war was unwinnable. The entire American strategic approach was based on that assumption. The SALT I accord and the still-to-be-completed SALT II treaty were negotiated on that basis.

But in the summer of 1976, President Gerald Ford, under pressure from the right wing of his own party and from his own Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, had decided to bring in an outside panel of experts to compete with the CIA. The idea was to give a group of outside experts, all hard-liners, access to the same data as the CIA and have them write their own national intelligence estimate of Soviet strategic capability and intentions. CIA Director George Bush had agreed with the idea.

Other CIA officials were bitterly, adamantly opposed.

The chairman of the group was Richard Pipes, a professor of Russian history at Harvard University. Included on the panel were Paul Nitze, a former Pentagon official; Paul Wolfowitz, an expert in strategic and tactical doctrine who worked for the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency; Gen. Daniel Graham, the head of the Defense Intelligence Agency; William Van Cleave

In 1976 this group represented a minority opinion. But it was a minority on the attack. A great debate on national defense was just beginning. The first target had been Henry Kissinger and his policy of detente with the Soviet Union. Now it was Team B vs. the CIA and its intelligence estimates. Later, attention would turn to President Jimmy Carter and his attempt to have SALT II ratified. Then the focus would shift to the 1980 national election.

The outside panel has come to be known as Team B, though its members never referred to it as Team B and usually called themselves the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board group (PFIAB, pronounced *Piff-e-yab*). They met in CIA headquarters in Langley, Va., and were paid on a per-diem basis with money that came from the CIA.

Team B's very first decision was that its members would not try to write their own intelligence estimate to offset the work of Team A, the regular CIA analysts. Instead Team B would prepare a detailed report demonstrating why the members believed the CIA had been so wrong for the previous 10 years.

All the resources of the CIA were made available to Team B: satellite photographs, intercepts of Soviet signals, secret Soviet military documents, public documents and reams of technical data. Each member took a particular area of interest and worked toward the November deadline. Experts in specific areas wrote chapters of the report and submitted them to Pipes, who acted as an overall editor. In some cases other outsiders with particular expertise were brought in to help the panel.

But all the work was done in the context of showing why past intelligence estimates had not adequately appreciated the Soviet strategic

The specific Team B conclusions are still highly classified, but aspects of the report were leaked to the media and Team B members have gained added prominence and written and spoken about their views in the past 4½ years.

Their conclusions can be divided into two areas.

The first concerns the intelligence process itself. Team B charged that the CIA had become too insulated and tended to perpetuate its own views. In addition, it had come to rely too much on purely technical data and not enough on Soviet military documents and statements of military philosophy and practices, Team B argued.

The report was particularly critical of the agency for "cultural mirror-imaging," as Graham put it.

"There was a tendency by the agency to project our assumptions on the Soviets," Graham said. "If we believed in mutual assured destruction, so must they. It was a major fault of their entire analytical process."

The second area had to do with Soviet intentions. They argued that the CIA had paid too little attention to Soviet military doctrine, the totality of the Soviet military effort and the relation of Soviet history and goals to its military program.

The members of Team B argued that the Soviets did not accept, and have never accepted, mutual assured destruction—the notion, called MAD, that there was a sufficient deterrent in the knowledge by both sides that a nuclear war would lead to the destruction of the attacker as well as the attacked. To make that case, Team B pointed to the new Soviet missile programs, the Soviet civil-defense program and the percentage of gross national product that the Soviets were spending on the military.

Pipes, who specialized in the area of Soviet military doctrine, argued that the CIA had ignored what the Soviets were saying they would do,